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GRANT AT VICKSBURG: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

BY

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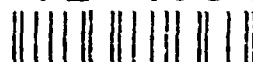
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GRANT AT VICKSBURG: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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In the spring of 1863 Major General Ulysses S. Grant led the Union Army in a bold offensive operation deep into the heart of the Confederacy and reduced the Rebel stronghold at Vicksburg, Mississippi. This audacious action is touted by many as the most brilliant campaign ever fought on American soil and is a timeless example of how what are now called the tenants of modern airland battle doctrine can lead to decisive victory on the battlefield. During the campaign Grant made two critical decisions that ultimately enabled the Union forces to be victorious. He chose to approach Vicksburg from the south rather than by way of a more traditional approach with secure lines of communication and, once established south of the city, he chose to sever his own lines of communication and strike deep into Confederate territory in an effort to rapidly defeat the Rebel forces in piecemeal fashion. This study seeks to review the circumstances and facts that existed at the time in an effort to determine how they may have influenced Grant's decision-making process at the time.

INTRODUCTION

General Ulysses S. Grant's conduct of the Vicksburg Campaign from the fall of 1862 through mid-summer 1863 has been called "the most brilliant campaign ever fought on American soil."¹ Military authorities have argued that the campaign embodies the spirit of offensive operations and is looked upon as an excellent example of how the basic tenets of modern airland battle doctrine (initiative, agility, depth and synchronization) can result in decisive military victory when properly applied. The audacious spirit of the campaign, characterized by speed, surprise and operational maneuver resulted in a decisive action that enabled Union forces to reduce the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg and thus open the Mississippi River for use by the North.

During the campaign, Grant made two significant decisions at the operational level that led him to pursue his chosen course of action. First, he shifted his line of operation from a more traditional overland route along an established transportation network, to a tenuous line down the Mississippi River far from his supply base. Secondly, once established on the east bank of the Mississippi below the Confederate positions, he chose to cut his lines of communication (LOCs) and drive his army between two strong rebel formations in an effort to defeat the enemy in piecemeal fashion. Since no formal written doctrine existed at the time from which Grant could conceive of an operational design or battlefield framework for the campaign, this paper will

attempt to analyze these two decisions in an effort to determine what caused Grant to opt for these courses of action.

The purpose is not necessarily to advocate or criticize Grant's decisions, but to look at the circumstances and facts as they existed at the time and determine what effect they had on the general's decision-making process. In Clausewitz's eyes the analyst must look at a military leader's actions in light of the settings of the moment ². It is not a matter of "judging the generalship displayed in any case, [one] cannot conclude, as in a prizefight, that the best man won, but must review the general's decisions and acts in light of the situation that presented itself to him." ³

GRANT'S EARLY YEARS

A critical analysis of Grant's actions during the campaign must necessarily begin with a look at the man himself. To understand what prompted the decisions he made and the actions he took during the long months of battle in and around Mississippi, it is useful to have an appreciation of Grant's background.

During the Mexican War Grant served under Major Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Several events left lasting impressions on the young lieutenant of quartermaster that were later manifested in Grant's decisions at Vicksburg. First, he learned the value of proper logistical planning when he saw the impact of widespread scurvy among Scott's troops in the early

stages of the deployment. Planners had failed to realize the debilitating effect of long sea voyages on troops and US forces suffered heavily during the movement. Grant's unit escaped this pitfall since his assessment resulted in a requirement to secure lemons to prevent the problem ⁴. Grant also learned that it was entirely possible to provision and sustain a large army, in hostile territory, over tenuous lines of communication, for an extended period. Scott demonstrated this during the campaign from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, which lasted some 18 months and often required Grant to secure provisions off the enemy economy to sustain his regiment. Finally, Grant repeatedly left his quartermaster duties unattended to race to the front in order to participate actively in the battle. This left him of the opinion that once an adequate logistics plan was initiated, the army's needs would be well attended and the main object became carrying the fight to the enemy.⁵

Apart from the lessons in Combat Service Support (CSS) learned during his service with Scott, Grant was also exposed to excellent tactical and operational mentorship. Scott's actions at Cerro Gordo, where US forces faced a large, well entrenched enemy, thoroughly impressed the young Grant. General Scott gave "his young war-students an uncommonly good lesson in the art of turning an apparently strong position. ...[when he] set his engineers and their men about the task of finding a way to get around Santa Anna's formidable defenses ...by which the enemy's flank could be turned."⁶ In a letter to his fiancée, Grant

alluded to his future actions at Vicksburg when he stated that, "Scott worked his way around with a great deal of labor and made the attack in the rear with some loss on our side and great loss on the part of the enemy."⁷ Grant's recognition of the utility of using the indirect approach in reducing an enemy's position was also evident in two letters he wrote in August and September of 1848. In both cases Grant questioned the veracity of assaulting heavily fortified positions frontally. In one letter he openly wondered how Scott could proceed to attack through the heart of the enemy's defenses when an obvious route existed to the rear of the enemy.⁸ In the other letter, Grant wrote, "I have tried to study the campaign...and in view of the great strength of the positions we have encountered and carried by storm. I am wondering whether there is not some other route by which the city could be captured without meeting such formidable obstacles, and at such great loss."⁹ Grant was perplexed by the disparate actions of Scott regarding tactical employment of troops. On one hand, he had seen him masterfully turn a position at Cerro Gordo, thus preserving his force, and on another occasion watch him waste lives in a difficult frontal action when more favorable options apparently existed.¹⁰ Finally, Grant saw in Scott the courage to allow subordinates the opportunity to carry out their missions without undue influence from above. He watched as Scott permitted General Worth to plan and execute the breaking of the Molino del Ray barrier without dictation or interference, and he saw the impact of that action on the army as

a whole. The performance of Worth's command improved markedly, and Scott was free to plan the next move of his army while current operations proceeded. More importantly, the action served to mollify Worth, whose relations with Scott to that point were strained,¹¹ a position Grant found himself in vis a vis Major General John A. McClernand in the midst of the Vicksburg Campaign some fifteen years later.

Grant's exposure to Scott and his experiences during the Mexican War were the foundation of his personal decision-making process during the Civil War. In Grant's own words, "when I was first entrusted with high military authority, [I] knew nothing of strategy except what [I] had learned by critical observation, upon the spot, of the modes and expedients by which the genius of Scott counter balanced the entrenched positions of the numerical superiority of the Mexicans."¹² His work as the regimental quartermaster; his observation of Scott at his best in reducing Cerro Gordo and empowering his subordinates; and his critical analysis of Scott's frontal assaults when an indirect approach seemed available were all in evidence during the months his Union Army struggled to secure Vicksburg.

In the interlude between the Mexican and Civil Wars, Grant served at several postings before leaving the army. This period, and his experiences as a civilian, were marked with disappointment and failure and are remarkable only inasmuch as they represent a period of trial by fire that produced a man of resoluteness. In his work The Military Education of Grant as a

General. Colonel Arthur Conger contends that "these humiliations had done for Grant something that life had not done for many other generals in the Civil or any other war; ...he knew himself and his own capacity unflinchingly to take punishment."¹³ This capacity to withstand criticism and maintain focus played a significant role in the generalship of Grant through the Vicksburg Campaign.

Grant reentered the service and took command of a unit in the Illinois Volunteers at the outbreak of the Civil War. Beginning with his service as a Colonel of the volunteers, and continuing through the Vicksburg Campaign, Grant was repeatedly subjected to criticism, direct interference, and rebuke by the press, his superiors, and political authorities. As a field soldier, Grant was predisposed to offensive action, feeling that the proper course was always to seek out the enemy and destroy his forces. He had the "soldier's impulse to strike rather than receive a blow."¹⁴ This led directly to repeated conflict with Major General Henry Wager Halleck, Grant's commander in the west during the early stages of the war. Grant felt that the enemy's forces were his center of gravity, whereas Halleck "believed in positional warfare. [Halleck felt] a careful study of the map would disclose certain places where retention was vital to the enemy."¹⁵ This difference was a constant source of conflict between the two and led to many rebukes by Halleck, including the defacto relief of Grant for a short period following the battle of Shiloh in mid-1862. This concern for positional warfare later

prompted Halleck to send Grant several messages from Washington encouraging caution during the Vicksburg Campaign . Although his immediate superiors often advocated caution and deliberateness, Grant remained predisposed to action. In his campaigns in Kentucky and Tennessee, he was quick to follow up success and go beyond the original concept of his plans to bring about convincing victory for his forces. ¹⁶ Halleck's displeasure with Grant's bold actions were most prevalent when some Rebel forces were able to escape from Ft Donelson, ¹⁷ and when Grant's command was attacked at Shiloh, resulting in great loss. In both cases, Grant deserved criticism for not taking adequate measures to protect his forces.

The criticisms of Grant's tactical acumen were also widespread in the press just prior to the Vicksburg Campaign. Although Shiloh was a Union victory, the press aggressively attacked the general for his conduct of the campaign. Reports suggested that Grant was missing from the battlefield and that his troops were completely surprised, resulting in hundreds of soldiers being slaughtered while still sleeping in their tents. ¹⁸ Even though the reports were incorrect, they had significant impact on Grant for several reasons. First, they alerted him to the unrest and general war weariness that existed in the north. Support for the war was ebbing and reports of continuing setbacks only served to further undermine the Federal position. ¹⁹ Secondly, Grant was always concerned about the public image of the army, a fact clearly evident in a letter he

wrote to the editor of a Cincinnati newspaper shortly after Shiloh. In the letter he denied that the army was caught unaware and resolutely defended the performance of his soldiers and his subordinate leaders.²⁰ The impact of the press on Grant's army was also evidenced in a series of letters exchanged by General William T Sherman, a subordinate commander in Grant's department, and his brother who was serving in the U.S. Senate during the war. Sherman was very critical of the press's reporting of the events and maintained that it adversely effected the morale of the army since their reports were patently untrue. Senator Sherman replied that the reports also had bad effect in Washington since they tended to fuel pressure to make radical changes in the leadership of the army.²¹

Two legs of the Clausewitz Trinity, the government (Grant's leaders in Washington) and the people (the press) were clearly at work in Grant's psyche. He firmly believed that success could only be achieved through aggressive action, but was beginning to realize that forces apart from his army also played heavily in the conduct of war. His predisposition for decisive action was under attack and his actions in the opening stages of the Vicksburg Campaign reflected uncertainty.²² It is fortunate for the Federal forces that Grant was motivated more by a sense of service than one of personal gain, since the attacks on him during the period would have forced many lesser men to abdicate.²³ In Grant's own words, "if [I] had sought and obtained the position [I] held from motives of ambition and by

use of influence, the fact that [I] had done so would have unnerved [me] and made [me] timid in the use of the means in [my] hands."²⁴

Grant's experiences and background combined to bring a very complex man to the Vicksburg area of operations in the late summer of 1862. He was offensively predisposed, but painfully aware that he must always take actions to protect his force, even when convinced that the enemy was no match for him. Years of setback and criticism had hardened him but also made him vulnerable to reports that reflected badly on his soldiers or undermined the support for his government and its cause. He understood the importance of logistics to large formations but wavered with respect to the need to maintain a fully established CSS network. He had seen a large army sustain itself in a foreign nation during his service in Mexico and now he was battling a Rebel army that was routinely routed from its bases yet reconstituted easily and returned to the fight. Finally, Grant was acutely aware of the country's need for a successful campaign in the West, one that could begin the process of preserving the Union.²⁵ What Grant did not know was that he had secured the support of the President of the United States who, when listening to his advisors suggest that a new general be appointed in the West, said, "I can't spare this man, he fights."²⁶

THE FIRST MOVE AGAINST VICKSBURG

The opening of the Vicksburg Campaign found Grant fully aware of the importance of control over the Mississippi River from both an operational and political point of view. The river represented the life blood of the Confederacy since it offered a gateway from the Southwest, through which Texas beef and replacements could flow. Additionally, it represented a significant psychological weapon against the North. As long as the Union could not capture the river in spite of all its efforts, the South projected signs of strength and credibility.²⁷ In this vein, Halleck wrote to Grant saying: "The eyes and hopes of the entire country were directed to [your] army...the opening of the Mississippi would be of more advantage to the Union cause than the capture of twenty Richmonds."²⁸ Understanding the realities of reducing Vicksburg, Grant deduced that his problem was, "to obtain a footing on the highlands of the eastern bank, and a base from which to operate against the city and its communications."²⁹ He considered approaches from both the north and the south before devising a traditional plan to reduce this 'Gibraltar of North America' by establishing a line of operation overland from the north northeast. The plan sought to control the railroad net between Memphis and Corinth, then drive along the Mississippi Central Railroad (MCRR) to secure his LOCs and lure the Vicksburg garrison out into battle. Simultaneously, ground and naval forces would assault Vicksburg

from the river. (Map # 1)³⁰ Several advantages accrued from this course of action. Control of the east-west railroad provided protection for Memphis from Rebel forces operating in central Tennessee and provided an excellent LOC for Grant's army. Moreover, there was some concern that opting for a move along the river "would have left all the state of Mississippi free to the rebels who could attack Union outposts at will (using interior lines of operation), and leave Memphis within reach of Bragg."³¹

Grant's plan called for Sherman, with some 32,000 troops, and in concert with Admiral David Dixon Porter, to advance along the river and "to reach Vicksburg as it were by surprise, while General Grant [with 40,000 troops] held in check Pemberton's army about Grenada, leaving [Sherman and Porter] to contend only with the smaller garrison of Vicksburg and its well-known (sic) strong batteries and defenses."³² Additionally, Halleck wired Grant that General Nathaniel P. Banks had been sent to New Orleans to mount an attack up the Mississippi River from the south and to act 'in cooperation' with him in the capture of Vicksburg.³³

Several shortcomings plagued the operation from the start. As Grant stated,

"In this wilderness, good common roads were almost unknown... and heavy rains often converted the rivulets into rivers, and the highways into impassable canals. Railroads, therefore, became the vital lines of support to all defensive armies, and the object of attack to every invading column. [Support of military operations] often depended solely on the security or destruction of the railroad lines.... Commanders [therefore] risked raids

and marched columns into the wilderness to
[conduct these operations]."³⁴

While Grant moved south along the MCRR, he left portions of his force to guard these important stations, losing strength with each move, whereas Rebel forces gained strength as they relinquished those same sites and withdrew along interior lines.³⁵ Secondly, Grant allowed his forces to be divided and not closely coordinated. He had great faith in Sherman and believed he would carry out the plan with little direction from higher headquarters in much the same vein as he had seen Worth do in Mexico. Furthermore, his experiences with the navy during operations along the Tennessee River and at Vera Cruz caused him to put great stock in the probable success of Sherman against the garrison at Vicksburg. Grant's faith in the navy was born of Commodore Andrew H. Foote's actions at Ft. Henry, where his gunboats reduced the Rebel defenses almost single handedly, and at Ft. Donelson, where Foote took extraordinary efforts to ensure that Grant's forces received the fire support they requested. Grant and Foote had developed a keen understanding and respect for one another that fostered a desire to cooperate toward a common goal rather than feed inter-service rivalries and jealousies.³⁶ Grant developed this same affinity with Admiral Porter and was thus confident that unity of effort would be achieved without need for unity of command. Sherman, on the other hand, had misgivings about the arrangement. In a letter to his brother in early December he stated: "...Things are not exactly right. Grant commands on this side, Curtis on the west

and Admiral Porter on the river. All ought to be under one head, but thus far I meet the heartiest cooperation."³⁷

Notwithstanding the apparent unity of effort enjoyed by the command, Grant's forces were still widely separated and reliant upon messenger traffic over bad terrain. Furthermore, they were guilty of applying the 'hope method' regarding the timely arrival of Banks from the south to participate in a coordinated attack on Vicksburg. Grant also did not designate a main effort and violated his own maxim of concentrating on the enemy's forces rather than a geographic location.

Furthermore, unknown to Grant at the time, Congressman McClelland of Illinois had gone to Washington to present a plan for capturing Vicksburg to President Lincoln. McClelland was an influential Democrat who vocally supported the Union cause, and the President was "ever ready to recognize and honor democrats of this kind."³⁸ McClelland's plan was based on the premise that

"a serious political crisis was building up in the great farm belt north of the Ohio River. ... In a year and a half of war the professionals [the army] had not managed to break the Confederate grip on the lower Mississippi River. ... This grip was inexorably strangling the life out of the middle west's willingness to go on with the war for the Union."³⁹

Swayed by McClelland's arguments, his political support, and perhaps by their shared experiences as fellow Illinois militiamen during the Black Hawk War,⁴⁰ Lincoln advanced McClelland in rank to major general and authorized him to raise a force and proceed with his plan.

As the campaign progressed, Grant learned of the McClernand initiative. His response was one of chagrin. First, he "was bewildered that such an operation would be mounted in his department without consultation...and was convinced that the behind-the-scenes political maneuvering would effect the Vicksburg Campaign as much as anything the Confederates did."⁴¹ Secondly, "he concluded that the authorities in Washington were tolerating McClernand's activities because they wanted an amphibious campaign by way of the Mississippi River."⁴² From that point on, Grant's attention was divided. He believed his planned approach to Vicksburg was prudent but he felt pressure to change his line of operation to meet the perceived desires of his political leaders and to provide the northern public with evidence of significant Union success.

As the battle unfolded, events drew Grant inexorably back toward Memphis and mandated the subsequent river campaign. On 20 December, Rebel cavalry commanded by Van Dorn raided Grant's supply base at Holly Springs, Mississippi, adversely effecting his CSS posture. Simultaneously, another cavalry force under Forrest cut the railroad between Columbus and Jackson, Tennessee, further interrupting Grant's LOCs.⁴³ These raids, coupled with concern expressed by Halleck that Rebels were moving in force toward Memphis from middle Tennessee, distracted Grant's attention from seeking out Pemberton's army along his line of operation and focused him back toward the north.⁴⁴ It must also be noted that to his south Rebel forces were operating in

small units and therefore did not offer Grant the general engagement he sought.⁴⁵ Additionally, although he was not in communication with Sherman, Grant did receive reports that Sherman's attack was successful and that Vicksburg was occupied, thus making further efforts to secure the MCRR unnecessary.⁴⁶ Accordingly, on 4 January 1863, he told General James B. McPherson to make preparations to withdraw to the Cornith-Memphis Railroad line and protect the LOC back to Memphis.⁴⁷

By 7 January, Grant learned that Sherman had failed to secure Vicksburg,⁴⁸ but it was too late to renew operations. He had diverted from his initial overland plan and his army was committed in movement toward Memphis. Concurrently, Grant received renewed pressure from Halleck to assemble his army at Memphis and prepare for a move on Vicksburg via the river. Halleck suggested that this is what the President desired and that they were prepared to reinforce McClernand with upwards of 20,000 troops to assist him in this movement.⁴⁹ The combined weight of poor overland movement, political pressure, an enemy unwilling to come out and fight, the potential of having to turn the central effort over to one of his subordinates (McClernand), and the reality that his army had to be concentrated in order to be effective, forced Grant to move to Memphis and reorient his effort.

It is often stated that Grant abandoned his first plan because the Confederates had so thoroughly disrupted his supply line, and this may be true.⁵⁰ However, when the concept of the

Clauswitzian Trinity is applied, the concerns of the GOVERNMENT and the PEOPLE appear to dominate those of the ARMY. The pressure exerted on Grant to conduct a river borne operation overcame the prudent tactical argument to deliberately develop an overland operation taking advantage of defendable LOCs and denying the Rebels freedom of action throughout Mississippi.

The initial chapter of the campaign also offered Grant one lesson that had significant impact on the rest of the venture to capture Vicksburg. After Van Dorn's raid, Grant's army subsisted for two weeks without effective LOCs. They 'lived off the land' and did so with little adverse impact on their operations.⁵¹ Sherman was also influenced by the availability of forage as shown in a letter to his brother where he noted that, "we find plenty of corn, fodder, cattle, sheep, etc. so that our enemies have not been starving."⁵² Federal leadership now saw that foraging was an acceptable solution to the CSS problem and this lesson bore fruit after consideration during the winter. In October Grant told Halleck that he did not believe an army could subsist itself in the country on forage alone,⁵³ yet four months after returning to Memphis, he launched a grand movement to the south carrying only five days of rations per man.

THE RIVER CAMPAIGN

Upon arrival in Memphis, Grant continued his analysis of how to reduce the fortress of Vicksburg. He looked at means to

secure the objective overland east of the river and still entertained the notion of using the MCRR route as a principal line of operation. Sherman, and many on Grant's staff, held that the overland route was the surest method to reduce the stronghold. In January, Sherman communicated to both his brother and wife that, "Vicksburg was too strong, and without the cooperation of a large army coming from the interior [securing] it is impracticable."⁵⁴ Sherman felt that the army must move overland via the MCRR for logistical support.⁵⁵ In essence, Sherman was recommending that their plan of the month prior be remounted since it had almost succeeded.

Realizing that the government preferred an amphibious operation, and confident that Banks would provide support from the south, Grant considered three options that would enable him to move south of Vicksburg and approach the city from that direction. First, he attempted to create a new channel in the Mississippi to bypass the city's shore based guns. Next, he tried opening a path via the bayous and rivers between Providence and the Red River in Louisiana to bypass Vicksburg. Lastly, he looked for an overland route on the west side of the Mississippi, again to move his forces past the Rebel positions that dominated the river approaches into the city.⁵⁶ By late January Grant directed his subordinates to concentrate on finding a way to move the forces south along the river. He designated that work on the Mississippi and Red River bypass operations were first priority.⁵⁷ and he notified Halleck that his army "must get

below the city to be used effectively".⁵⁸ His memory of Scott's success in turning a strong enemy position is clearly in evidence.

Throughout the winter Grant pushed work forward on the various schemes to bypass Vicksburg. Unfortunately bad weather, bad press, and political prodding perpetually hamstrung the effort.

The river at times seemed to be in the employ of the Confederate government, from the diligence and power with which it closed canals, filled up cuts, and otherwise rendered useless the plans of generals and engineers and the tools of thousands of workman⁵⁹

The press carried stories reflecting poorly on the Union leadership, indicating that disease and hardship were rampant and the army was making no progress against the Rebel forces along the Mississippi.⁶⁰ Moreover, Halleck's frequent queries demanded to know when significant progress could be expected, as the president's patience diminished.⁶¹ Finally, General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General of the Army, passed through Memphis as an emissary from Lincoln to evaluate progress. In a meeting with Mrs. Grant, Thomas indicated that the country was tired of the inactivity of the army and alluded to the possibility that Grant would soon be replaced.

Interestingly, as early as 4 February Grant indicated that he had little faith in the practicality of any of the schemes to bypass Vicksburg. He told Halleck that it was impossible to succeed in the effort to cut new canals given the paucity of engineering skills and resources at his disposal.⁶² In

discussing the Thomas visit with his wife, he indicated that, " I never intended to use the canal. I never expected to, but started it to give the army occupation and to assure the country until the waters [of the Mississippi] could subside sufficiently [for his forces to transit south]." ⁶³ Further evidence that the canal and Red River operations were never intended to be successful bypass routes is offered by Major General Zenas Bliss, whose unit arrived in the area in June 1863. Bliss wrote that when he passed the canal site he noted that it was a rather trifling affair, too shallow for craft of any real size. ⁶⁴ Notwithstanding his views on the bypass concept, Grant maintained his efforts on the various projects until early March, when rains destroyed all his labor. He ceased work in those areas but maintained that in the end his troops were hardened by the effort and their morale had been improved as a result. ⁶⁵

Union actions over the winter months suggest that Grant's efforts to bypass the city were an outgrowth of his experiences in Mexico. It is reasonable to conclude that his aim was in fact to find an indirect approach into the city. However, his letters home, and to Halleck, suggest that his labors during the period were merely efforts to keep the pressures of the government and the people from exerting too much influence on his actions with the army.

ASSAULT FROM THE SOUTH

Although the evidence shows why Grant ultimately chose to prosecute the reduction of Vicksburg from the south, little is available to gain insight into the scheme of operations he envisioned to accomplish that aim. This paucity of information is the result of two characteristics of Grant's style of leadership. First, "it was always Grant's habit to never give express orders in advance, but to await the contingencies of a campaign. None of his plans were so precise that he could not vary from them, and all of them allowed for the uncertain and unexpected movement of the enemy."⁶⁶ However, he never wavered from the goal of ultimately destroying his enemy's forces and his subordinates were attune to this intent. Grant departed Memphis intent upon focusing his efforts on the destruction of the Rebel Army in Mississippi and knowing his actions would be determined by where he found the enemy. Secondly, Grant was fully aware of Halleck's predisposition to focus on the control of key locations rather than the destruction of enemy forces. He had experienced this at earlier stages in the war and believed that Halleck's reluctance to aggressively pursue the enemy had allowed Rebel forces to escape on more than one occasion.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Halleck had informed Grant on numerous occasions that he should consider cooperating with Banks to reduce Port Hudson prior to moving on Vicksburg once Grant was established in the south.⁶⁸ Collectively, these points suggested that the campaign in the

south could become very deliberate and time consuming, and time was not a luxury that Grant had at his disposal. The population and the government wanted action and, more importantly, his army would be at the far end of a tenuous supply line. A quick, decisive victory was needed to satisfy the demands at all points of the Clausewitzian Trinity. Many people have suggested that Grant feared he would not be allowed to make the campaign as he envisioned it initially if he had informed Halleck of his concept beforehand.⁶⁹ The divergent war fighting styles of these two generals supports that view.

Once established south of Vicksburg, Grant's proclivity for offensive action aimed at the destruction of enemy forces became the dominant factor in his decision-making process. Although pressed by Halleck to establish a cooperative relationship with Banks in order to make use of all available combat power in the reduction of Vicksburg,⁷⁰ Grant saw an opportunity to begin the destruction of the Rebel Army immediately. Banks was still engaged in operations at Port Hudson further south and Grant saw no purpose served in assisting in that endeavor. He believed the quickest path to victory lie in immediately destroying Rebel ground forces.

Grant knew that his position could become tenuous since he was at the distant end of long supply line, he was outnumbered by the combined forces of Pemberton in Vicksburg and Johnston at Jackson, and the weather still hampered the movement of forces and supplies across the battlefield. Additionally, he realized

that the weather and terrain would have similar effect on Confederate operations and that the Big Black River was an effective barrier, limiting the Rebels' ability to rapidly shift forces along their interior lines. Two other aspects of the operation also played in Grant's decision. He had left Sherman north of Vicksburg to conduct operations along the Yazoo Pass in concert with naval forces and he had instructed Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson to conduct a cavalry raid along a line from LaGrange, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi and then south toward Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (map 2)⁷¹ The net effect of these deception operations was to fix portions of both Pemberton's and Johnston's forces and disrupt Rebel CSS efforts in Mississippi, thus further limiting their ability to maneuver.⁷² On 3 May 1863, Grant notified Halleck that he was in receipt of reports that Grierson had wreaked havoc throughout Mississippi on his raid and in effect had "knocked the heart out of the State."⁷³ Grant realized that he was in a position to exploit success. Confederate forces were preoccupied with his diversionary efforts, the terrain inhibited movement by both armies, thus favoring the side with the initiative, and his army's morale was high.⁷⁴ In letters to Halleck, McClernand, and Sherman, Grant clearly articulated his intent to press the enemy. He called Sherman south to give his force greater weight, he told McClernand to keep the enemy under constant pressure, and he informed Halleck that the road to Vicksburg was clear.⁷⁵ He saw that his army could both forage off the land and maneuver to

establish local force superiority for short periods of time.⁷⁶

Over the next three weeks, Grant kept the pressure on the Rebels by relentlessly driving his army from one engagement to the next and repeatedly creating situations where he enjoyed local force superiority. "Constant movement was the imperative. Deep in enemy territory and a long way from it's base, this army could do almost anything but sit still."⁷⁷ Grant's relentless movement was the natural result of his belief that "there came a time in every great battle where both sides were exhausted to the point of defeat and where victory would belong to the side who was able to strike first."⁷⁸ His appreciation for the concept of the "culminating point" was clearly in evidence throughout the campaign south of Vicksburg. His correspondence to Halleck and his various subordinates throughout the drive reveal a man confident that as long as he kept the enemy off balance and unable to bring its superior arms to bear at a decisive point, he could defeat it.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

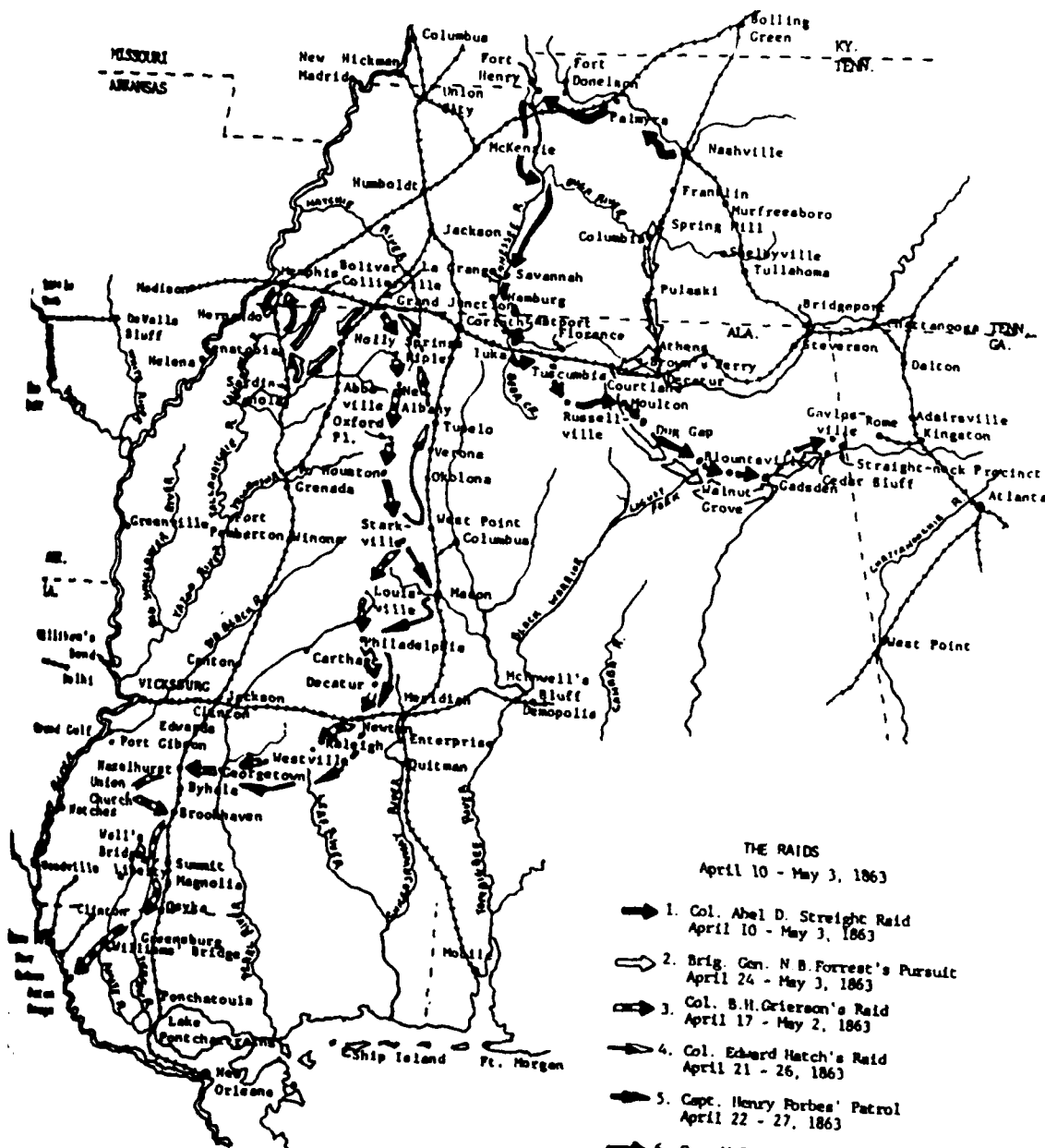
General U. S. Grant's actions at Vicksburg can justifiably be labeled "the most brilliant campaign ever fought on American soil." All the tenets of modern airland battle doctrine were masterfully woven into his operational design. He sought, achieved, and maintained the "initiative" over the Confederate forces defending Vicksburg. He carried the fight to those forces

throughout the "depth" of the battlefield, denying them the advantages they should have enjoyed as a result of interior lines and superior forces. He maintained a sense of balance that provided the "agility" his forces needed to respond to the exigencies of the battlefield, yet remained focused on his objective, the destruction of Rebel Army. Additionally, he was able to effectively synchronize the efforts of his varied forces within the limits of his communications capability. Maneuver, combat support and combat service support efforts were integrated into a common plan and, at the tactical level, coordinated to favorably affect that plan. (Efforts to synchronize at the operational level were often inhibited by an inability to communicate among the necessary headquarters in a timely fashion.)

Grant's appreciation of what has come to be known as "operational art" was far ahead of his time. He fully grasped the concepts of center of gravity, lines of operation, and culminating points, and he used them to great advantage in designing and conducting the campaign to reduce Vicksburg. His use of deception to fix and confuse the Confederate forces enabled him to maneuver at the operational level and bring his numerically inferior force to bear against a widely separated, uncoordinated Rebel Army.

Notably, Grant was always able to remain focused on his objective. In spite of the pressures exerted on him and his army by the government, the press, and occasionally his subordinates,

he remained committed to the destruction of the Confederate Army in Mississippi. [He possessed] "a quiet confidence in himself which never forsook him, and which amounted indeed almost to a feeling of fate... Having once determined in a matter that required irreversible decision, he never reversed nor even misgave, but was steadily loyal to himself and his plan."⁸⁰ This singleness of purpose permeated to every level of his command. Generals and privates alike understood Grant's intent to destroy the Rebel Army and they conducted themselves accordingly, even when not personally convinced of Grants methods. General Sherman, who steadfastly argued that it was folly to dash inland without a well established logistics base, gave testament to Grant's visionary qualities when looking down on the expanding CSS base on the Yazoo River during the final stages of the Vicksburg siege. He turned to Grant and stated: "Until this moment, I never thought your expedition a success. I never could see the end clearly, until now. But this campaign: this is a success if we never take the town."⁸¹



THE RAIDS April 10 - May 3, 1863

- ➔ 1. Col. Abel D. Streight's Raid
April 10 - May 3, 1863
- ➔ 2. Brig. Gen. N. B. Forrest's Pursuit
April 24 - May 3, 1863
- ➔ 3. Col. B. H. Grierson's Raid
April 17 - May 2, 1863
- ➔ 4. Col. Edward Hatch's Raid
April 21 - 26, 1863
- ➔ 5. Capt. Henry Forbes' Patrol
April 22 - 27, 1863
- ➔ 6. Gen. W. S. Smith's March to Tallahatchie
April 17 - 23, 1863
- ➔ 7. Col. George Bryant's March to the Coldwater
April 18 - 23, 1863

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